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# ATTEMPT

To set the DOCTRINE of

# ORIGINAL SIN

IN A

# RIGHT LIGHT.

By NICHOLAS MANNERS.

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*I publish this Piece because I believe it is true; and, that  
others may either confirm or confute it.*

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## The INTRODUCTION.

SEVERAL years ago, I began to doubt whether the doctrine of Original Sin was rightly understood; and whether the definitions of it, which I had seen, were calculated to promote the principle and practice of piety. Nor could I define it to my own satisfaction. But about seven years since, I was relieved by what I shall call revelation. From which time I have not considered actual, as the effect of Original Sin; but rather as the fruit of a wrong use of a right state of mind, restored to all men by the merit and spirit of Christ. And, agreeably to this, about twelve months ago, in a printed piece, I thus defined the doctrine, and assigned some reasons to support it. This had the fate of most other things; it found both friends and foes. It likewise produced some conversations betwixt myself, and the Rev. Mr. ——— and others; the substance of which is as follows: And

Inasmuch as I had asserted, in the piece before-mentioned, that man's original body consisted of the same sort of matter bodies do now; Mr. ——— said, "I stumbled at the threshold; and that, he supposed, was the cause of my after-errors;" adding, "Man's body, in the beginning, was not a body of flesh and blood." To which I replied by observing, that it certainly was, inasmuch as it was supported by food, Adam being commanded to eat. This carried so much conviction as to make him confess, "That Adam did eat." But, notwithstanding, he immediately denied, "That he evacuated." And to shew the absurdity of supposing that he did, he asked me "Whether I believed Paradise was bestrewed with Adam's excrements?" I told him, if he did the one he must do the other; the second being a necessary consequence of the first. But he would not allow it.

Another argument used by Mr. ——— to prove that Adam's body did not consist of flesh and blood was, "That if he had not sinned, nothing would have died; but, on the contrary, every thing would have been in an improving way; that plants would have become animals; animals men; and men angels." To which I opposed this: That if plants were designed to be the food of animals, (which they certainly were)

were) then, as thereby their parts would have been separated, and their structure destroyed, they must have died. Yet he would not grant it.

We then entered upon the principal point, viz. the state of children; concerning whom I observed, that, agreeable to St. Paul's doctrine, as they are all made *righteous*, they are, in consequence, qualified for heaven. In answer to which he said, "They all receive a seed of grace; and that they who die in their infancy pass through a state of trial in the other world, and are purified from original corruption there." I then asked him how that differed from purgatory? To which he made no reply.

On these grounds Mr. ——— condemned my doctrine. But as I judged they had no foundation either in scripture or reason, I consequently considered it as unjust; and therefore complained of the procedure. This produced a second conversation. But Mr. ——— was absent. And although I never considered the matter of Adam's body as having any concern with the moral state of his offspring's mind, yet my opposers would go upon that ground, and affirmed, "that his body was neither earthly nor mortal." I maintained that it was both, and produced the following passages to prove it: *And God formed man of the dust of the ground. And he said, dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.* Now the first of these informs us of the matter of which he was made, dust, or red earth, or a composition of the elements. But did the Lord change the properties of the elements by casting them into a human form? Or rather was not this composition reducible, in a natural way, to its originals? This is answered by the second passage, *Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.* But my opponents were so prepossessed of the notion of Adam's body being something superior to flesh and blood, that they would not allow "dust thou art" belonged to his original state.

The next particular proceeded upon was the condition all are brought into by the new covenant; which I affirmed to be such as rendered children capable of inheriting heaven; and, consequently, qualified them for the service of God. To confirm which, I cited St. Paul's parallel, which ascribes as much of salvation to the second, as it does of destruction to the first, Adam, in respect of mankind. But, to suppose they remain either guilty, or unholy, or without hope of a



glorious resurrection after Christ became their mediator, is to suppose them to be in the same condition as if he had not so become; which contradicts St. Paul's account of all being made righteous. In answer to this, it was said, "Facts are against it; we do not find these things in children." But, as the words are as clear in the one case as they are in the other, is it not a boldness unbecoming any believer of the bible to say, they have not that sense, which, according to the common rules of construction, they must have?—As for facts, by what criterion shall we judge of them? Children's ignorance of spiritual things, I presume, affords no proof of a depraved principle; for are they not equally ignorant of temporal things? And yet, notwithstanding, they have senses to discern, and reason (the faculty) to judge of them. If ignorance then in earthly things is no evidence of the want of natural powers to comprehend them, neither is it in spiritual things that they have not a divine disposition. And, by the same rule, the case of those who have attained to the use of reason may be determined; for if their senses and reason were never exercised upon outward objects, they would never know them. In like manner, if religious objects were always absent, neither would they be understood. But as ignorance in the first case would not argue the want of ability, neither would it in the second.

And as ignorance herein argues nothing, so neither does desire improperly placed. Desire is natural to the animal appetite, and to the spiritual soul. But as appetite, without understanding, may make the body eat that which is destructive; so may spiritual desire, through want of a right direction, fix upon improper objects. A wrong choice then of objects may be more the effect of error than of evil inclination.

Neither are the passions of children, in general, any proof of their depravity; for passions are inseparable from human nature in its best estate, our Lord being possessed of them. And they are peculiarly necessary for children, to supply the want of understanding; for in many cases they are not otherwise able to make known their wants, disorders, and dangers. Nor, in particular, does wrong, nor the excess of right repentment in children, require any other reason to be assigned for them than the want of understanding; inasmuch as they do not discern betwixt good and evil, right and wrong.

I shall



I shall now give a BRIEF ACCOUNT of some PARTICULARS respecting the DOCTRINE of ORIGINAL SIN.

ORIGINAL SIN is a subject which, I think, is much misunderstood. I will, therefore, as a well-wisher to mankind, endeavour to rectify the mistakes persons of different minds concerning it seem to have fallen into. This shall be done, First, by defining its nature; and, Secondly, by shewing that the passages produced to prove it signify no such thing.

Original Sin then, (as an act) according to the commonly-received sense, is that sin which Adam and Eve were guilty of in eating the forbidden fruit. But as Adam was the head and representative of the human race, it was not his sin only, but the sin of his offspring also: *For by one man's disobedience many (ἐν πολλοῖς, the multitudes of men) were made sinners.* Yet this was only according to their capacity, viz. that as Adam and Eve were personal sinners, so their seed were seminal ones. However, they thereby incurred guilt: *For by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation.*—And that their minds were made immoral, is manifest from the *life of Christ being the light of men; a light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world.* But these properties of a divine principle, as coming from Christ, had been unnecessary, if the light and life of their created condition had continued.—Neither is any thing more certain than that temporal death took place as soon as they had sinned; inasmuch as thereby they were deprived of the privilege of eating of the tree of life, which would have given them a right to a transformation of their animal and mortal nature, into that which is spiritual and immortal, without passing through death and the resurrection.—And, that they were subjected to eternal sufferings, the nature of their soul, which was immortal, evidences; for what but its ceasing to exist, or the forgiveness of their sin, could have saved them from it? Neither of which is implied in the sentence.

Now to this I shall oppose what has been done to deliver all men from it. And, first, the ground of all the good done to mankind, is the promise of the seed of the woman to break the serpent's head. But this promise was unconditional, did not require faith in Adam's offspring to free them from Original Sin. Rather as they became sinners in a seminal way, so they

they became saints also: a clear confirmation of which is contained in the contrary part of St. Paul's parallel, *That by the obedience of one shall many* (*οἱ πολλοί*, the multitudes of men) *be made righteous*. Here then is a salvation which all men are partakers of, prior to their personal existence; and, consequently, without any condition performed by themselves.

Hence then as their sinful state implied guilt, a depraved mind, temporal death, and subjection to eternal sufferings; so their righteous condition contained pardon, a pure mind, a right to the resurrection of the body, and the happiness of heaven. These, it is evident, they either had in possession or reversion. In the first case, they possessed guilt and impurity, and were subject to death and damnation; and in the second, they had pardon and purity, and a right to all the rest — And that the one of these implies as much as the other, is evident from the sense of the words, and from the nature and the necessity of the things. The words contain, as before observed, an equal sense of a contrary kind, and the things are such as none can be saved without. For a removal of guilt, and a renewal of nature, are absolutely and indispensably necessary as a qualification for the kingdom of God. And the time of their being given must be early, inasmuch as many die as soon as they are born. Nor is there any intimation, in the bible, that this is done either at or after their birth. No mention is made that the Almighty, by a divine operation, saves dying children from a sinful soul, in order to save them from sinking into hell. Rather the state of children, as such, separate from any supposed immediate supernatural influence, is considered by Christ as characteristic of a converted man, and a qualification for heaven: *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven*. I conclude then, that what was done for one was done for all; and that the time of its being done was when the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life; which, it is highly probable, was when Christ commenced the mediator of men.

I now propose to consider those passages of scripture which, I judge, in this case have been misunderstood; and, consequently, impertinently applied. The first of which is, *Adam begat a son in his own likeness*, Gen. v. 6. This, by some, is supposed to signify, that sinful Adam begat a sinful son.

son. Adam had now lived 130 years; but whether he was a saint or a sinner, who can say? But if it could be said, it would signify nothing; for the condition of his son, in a religious respect, did not depend on his own, inasmuch as he was not then the representative of mankind; that office ceasing with him as soon as Christ commenced the surety of sinners. Hence it necessarily follows, that what his son was, he was in consequence of what Christ, the second Adam and representative of mankind, had done for him: And that was the being made righteous; for so St. Paul says, in respect of all men, as it signifies a salvation from Original Sin.

Besides, is it not generally believed that Adam, prior to his begetting Seth, was a believer of the promise made in paradise? And if so, then he was not a sinner, but a saint. And is it not also supposed that Seth was a son of God, he being one of those who first began to call on the name of the Lord, and from whom descended such as were stiled *the sons of God*? If then both the father and the son were good, (which there is much more reason to believe they were than that they were not) how could Adam be a sinful father, and Seth a sinful son? Whatever then Adam begetting a son in his own likeness signifies, it cannot, I think, for the reasons already assigned, signify their sinfulness. It may respect their outward form and features; or signify a sameness in regard of moral goodness of mind, both as the effect of what Christ has done, and as the fruit of the immediate parent. Christ has redeemed all men by price, and so purified them as to make them righteous. And that this was done in Adam, in whom all men existed, and in whom they all became sinful, I think should not be disputed. If then human nature was renewed in the root of it, and if no intervening cause change its quality, holy souls will as natural flow from it as unholy ones would have done, if it had not been renewed. This then is one cause why parents may produce good children. A second is, (if it has any influence in the case) that good parents will more probably produce good than bad children. It is indeed said, that parents do not produce children as good, but as men and women. But this is a distinction I do not understand; for how is a good man a man otherwise than he is a good man? He cannot be a good and a bad man at the same time. And is it not more natural to suppose that he will produce according to his quality than contrary to it? Nor



is, this disproved by the right sense of the following similitude, viz. that the seed of an apple-tree which was grafted on a crab stock will produce common crabs. For this, I am told, is not so in respect of all sorts, some producing exactly like themselves; nor in regard of degrees in any, none being so bad as the crab stock would produce. But if we allow it (for argument sake) to be so, the cases are not equal; for man, since the fall, cannot with propriety be compared to a crab stock, inasmuch as he was cured by Christ, who became the life and light of all men. To impute then to men in Christ things only applicable to beings out of him, is preposterous. And that none are out of him in a seminal sense, is certain, all being made righteous by him as they were made unrighteous by Adam. Hence it necessarily follows, that if any are out of him, it is in consequence of their own conduct. This illustration then casts no light on the subject, and so for any thing it signifies, all men, as made so by Christ, come into the world morally good. However, whether either of these be the sense or not, (as there is abundantly more reason to believe that it does not signify a sinful likeness than that it does) it serves to shew that a cause is weak, and wants support, which is made to rest on so slender a foundation; and that if sounds were not taken for sense, such scriptures would not be supposed to signify any such thing. But when error, or want of understanding, has made men militate against the truth, shadows are substituted for substances to support them.

The second passage produced to prove that a depraved principle is derived from Adam, is, *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.* Job xiv. 4. Now that which some suppose to be the sense of this, is, That Adam being unclean, all who descend from him come into the world in the same condition. I have already observed, that if St. Paul understood his own subject, the uncleanness derived from Adam to others is entirely taken away: That Christ, the second Adam, has so far freed all men from the moral effects of the fall as to fit them for heaven; for of such as children are when born into the world, he says, his kingdom consisteth.—But some, to support the contrary supposition, say, that, according to St. Paul, justification only, through Christ, came upon all men; and that, in consequence, their hearts continued unholy. Then I may with as much

much confidence say, that condemnation only, by Adam, came upon all men; and, therefore, their hearts remained holy; for one of these contrary terms implies as much in the one case as the other does in the other. But, setting aside these insignificant suppositions, I assert, that they became as well unholy as guilty through Adam, and were sanctified as well as justified through Christ. And, as a confirmation of this, I affirm that they are never separate (if both be necessary) in their subjects; that all who are justified, in a personal sense, are at the same time sanctified either in part or perfectly: and if so, then surely in a seminal sense also. And, indeed, justification without sanctification is insignificant, as it neither saves from a sinful soul, nor qualifies to serve the Lord, nor prepares for heaven. Seeing then that justification and sanctification are inseparably connected; it infers, that all upon whom justification unto life came, were sanctified also.

Whatever then be the sense of this subject, it cannot signify any thing contrary to the sense of St. Paul, in respect of the condition in which children are born. And if it has any spiritual meaning, why should it not signify personal sinners? The question and the answer, in that case, would be much more proper than in the other; for, on that supposition, it might be said, what sinner can cleanse his own soul? Not one. And, indeed, the context seems to lead to a different sense from what is commonly put upon the text; and, therefore, should have some weight in determining the sense of it. It runs thus: *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down. He fleeth also like a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.* Now what is there here from which to conclude, that this uncleanness is sinful, or, if it be, that it is the consequence of Original Sin? The being born of a woman is no proof of it; for, doubtless, if Adam had not sinned, children would have been so born; and, I suppose, without sin. A short and troublesome life, bounded, generally, by threescore years and ten, are mentioned, first, as matter of wonder why the Lord should open his eyes upon such an one, and why he should bring him into judgment with

with him; and, secondly, as a reason why that judgment, or the effects of it, should cease: *Turn from him*, he says, *that he may rest, and accomplish as an hireling his day*. As if he had said, Let him alone, add not to the evils his mortal state subjects him unto, by any troubles inflicted for his trial; of which Job himself had a plentiful portion. That something like this is the sense of these sayings, is little less than certain; but why the being born sinful should be assigned as the reason thereof, I see not: For, although Original Sin, as an act, might be one cause both of the shortness and troubles of life; yet how long would man have lived, and how free from trouble would he have been, if he had not sinned? Surely not for ever in this world. The constitution of his body carried in it a sufficient evidence of this. For it was composed of flesh, blood, and bones; had parts, joints, ligaments, nerves, arteries, veins, &c. Now a body consisting of so many parts, and so curiously constructed, was neither calculated for long continuance nor an entire exemption from trouble. For, first, the matter of it was elementary; and, secondly, its manner was vegetative: It was made of the elements, and grew or lived by the accession of outward things; and, consequently, was corruptible; for all bodies composed of contrary things, (which the elements are) and supported by what is extrincical to them, have a period which they cannot pass. Hence it is, that every living composition comes to dissolution, in a natural way. In man, such is the nature of the circulating fluid, that by passing through the vessels of his body, it leaves a sediment behind, which adheres to their sides; and which, by gradually increasing, contracts the passage, and renders them incapable of conveying the blood to the several parts of the body, and that brings death: The whole process of which, no doubt, gives pain; it being an interruption to, and consequently a disorder of, nature.—External things too, contribute to contract life, and increase its troubles. The being exposed to the elements, and, in particular, to the different degrees of heat and cold, (the certain effects of day and night, summer and winter) precipitates or retards the blood in its motion, and increases or diminishes perspiration; the effects of which are according to the degree of their different causes. And is it not absolutely certain, that the blood circulated in the body in the beginning; and equally so, that they were exposed to  
a continual



a continual vicissitude of seasons? For, let the situation of paradise be ever so pleasant, yet if the earth revolved as it does now, there could not be such a sameness in the seasons but that contrary effects would be felt. And if Adam and his offspring had continued in their created condition, these effects, it is highly probable, had been felt more forcibly in the polar regions, and some other parts of the earth, which would have been inhabited as the people increased.—Neither did man's body subsist of itself, but by the accession of other things; of which, though there was no want, yet dependence on any outward thing renders the continuance of life somewhat uncertain.—And that bodies, in the beginning, were subject to disorder, is also probable from the abundance of medicine which minerals, roots, vegetables, &c. afford for every disease incident to human nature; which it is more reasonable to suppose was rather designed for man's created condition than for that, which some suppose, the Lord foresaw as the effect of the fall.—Forasmuch then as disorder and death were compatible with man's first estate, how can it be said that a short and troublesome life is the sole effect of the first offence, and of coming into the world sinful? These effects were increased thereby, (and so are they by actual sin also) but seem to have an higher origin.—And yet I do not say that man would have died if he had not sinned; however, that would not have been the effect of his nature, but practice. If he had not eaten the forbidden fruit, his right to eat of the tree of life had been the happy consequence; and that would have preserved him from death, and made him an heir of bodily immortality. For any thing then that appears, this text no more proves that children are born with satanical souls than the former. And while our Lord compares the condition of a converted man to the state of a child, and considers that state as a qualification for heaven; I dare not so far contradict him as to say, it is a sinful one.

The third passage supposed to contain proof of moral depravity being derived from Adam is, *That which is born of the flesh, is flesh*, John iii. 6. To be born of the flesh, is, by some, supposed to be born sinful, as the consequence of Original Sin. As, on the contrary, to be born of the spirit is to be made holy. Now these contrary things have long passed, with many, for truths equally certain. But, perhaps, it is possible to find a flaw in the first of them. Our Lord

Lord said, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* To which Nicodemus replied, *How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* In answer to which, our Saviour said, *Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh: and that which is born of the spirit, is spirit.*—Now the grand point of enquiry is, what it is to be born of the flesh: which can only be determined by attending to the nature of the subject, in which, indeed, there is no mystery; for nothing is more obvious than that Nicodemus speaks only of a bodily birth, which he supposed impossible for a man to have a second time. And it is as evident, that our Lord's answer is agreeable thereto. As if he had said, What if it could be so, what would it signify, seeing that that which is born of the flesh or body, is but flesh or body; and, therefore, not that spiritual birth which carnal minds require. Thus the birth of the body is opposed to the birth of the soul. And other opposition betwixt the flesh and the spirit, in this passage, I judge, there is none. And, indeed, it is wonderful how any other ever came to be thought of. But when a system wants support, any thing that has the appearance of a proof, however foreign to the purpose, is pressed into the service of it.

However, though this passage affords no proof of minds originally depraved, yet some suppose that a sinful soul, when and wheresoever it is, is a proof of it. Now such do not see that free agents, who are in a state of probation, however free from a sinful nature, have a liberty of choosing good or evil, and thereby of continuing or corrupting their good disposition. Thus angels and Adam, who were holy in heart, prior to practice, corrupted themselves. Notwithstanding then that all children are saved from Original Sin, and thereby prepared for the paradise of God; yet when understanding, agency, and accountableness take place, it is as easy for them, as it was for angels and Adam, to sin and corrupt their souls. And it is certain, the abuse of free agency is the first and principal scriptural cause of all evils; for condemnation for sin always supposes they might have served God, and not sinned against him. It never makes any allowance for the evil of actual, as being the effect of Original Sin; but charges sinners with being the authors of their own actions, and

and condemns them accordingly. But with what justice could the Lord do this; if a soul, in the image of satan, were the first cause of their conduct? It would be as unjust as for a king to condemn a man to die for not walking, when it was not his fault that he had no feet.—It is indeed said, that though sinful souls are prior to practice, yet the grace of God appears to prevent the commission of evil, and to prepare them to do good; and, therefore, if sin be committed, it is their own fault. I answer, it is not the appearing of any thing, that can presently answer these purposes; inasmuch as actions are the effect of an inward principle, and are according to the nature of it. If then divine grace does not only appear to, but also dispossess the soul of its sinfulness prior to practice, it is sins of necessity. And if so, how can the committer be condemned? And if not, then not damned: But the scripture represents sin as the proper cause of both.—I grant, indeed, that unbelief is also considered as a cause of condemnation; but then it is only of a secondary sort, viz. for rejecting that salvation which sin renders necessary: But if sin were not an evil and damnable thing, that salvation would not be necessary; and, therefore, the neglect of it not evil and dangerous.—If then a right practice suppose a right principle; and if the Lord require the first, it infers, that all of whom it is required, are in possession of the second. Hence, it necessarily follows, that at whatever time, and in whatever manner and degree, the Lord requires his creatures to serve him; it supposes them capable of complying with the requirement; in which, if they fail, that is their offence; and for which they are justly condemned.

The fourth scripture cited to prove the original depravity of men, is, *And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*, Eph. ii. 3. To shew that this signifies no such thing, the state of nature must be considered. And Adam's original nature, I presume, is out of the question. Nor, perhaps, does that state of nature into which he fell, make any part of its meaning; as none continued in that condition after the new covenant commenced. This is clear from St. Paul's parallel already mentioned: That as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. These are of equal extent in respect of persons and things. If then by condemnation, for Adam's



fin, we lost the favour and image of God and a right to immortality; by justification, through Christ, they are all regained. Nor would less qualify those for glory who die in their infancy; nor prepare the living for personal obedience; nor render the disobedient condemnable. And, agreeably to this, it is said, that the Gentiles did *by nature the things contained in the law*. By that nature which was consequent on being delivered from Original Sin, they comported, in point of practice, with the Lord's moral commands. And this, I judge, is the natural state of all men.—To which, by some, is opposed this passage: *By nature the children of wrath*. Now this respects the Jews and Gentiles mentioned in the preceding part of the chapter. The Gentiles, St. Paul says, *had walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air; and the Jews had fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind: and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*, that is, as the Gentiles. Now this state of nature cannot be that by which the Gentiles did the things contained in the law. Rather, that nature, by a wrong use of their free-agency in walking according to the course of this world, &c. was corrupted; and, thereby they became the children of wrath. And this judgment is supported by the Apostle himself, where he mentions both the cause and the consequence; what they did, and the effect of it. *And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*, v 1. Trespasses and sins were the cause, and death the consequence. Now death, it is certain, signifies condemnation, inasmuch as all who sin are condemned to die an eternal death. And it is equally certain, that condemnation and wrath are the same; for *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. And as trespasses and sins, committed by themselves, were the cause of this death, condemnation or wrath, *by nature the children of wrath* cannot signify the state in which they were born, but the condition into which they had brought themselves by their actual disobedience. And which, being contrary to their quickened condition, styled, in the scripture, a state of grace, is, by way of opposition, called a state of nature. And this, I judge, is all that is to be understood by it. This then affords no proof of minds originally depraved.

I shall

I shall now briefly touch upon some other passages which have been pressed into this service.

*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Some suppose they see original sin in this. But who that looks at the former part of the chapter, and the 12th verse in particular, will not see otherwise; for it is said, *all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.* Had corrupted; so then they themselves were the cause of this corruption; and for which God justly punished them; which he could not have done, if they had not been the cause of it.

*They are all gone out of the way.* This passage like the former, speaks only of what they themselves had done; for if they had not been in the way, they could not have gone out of it.

I need not multiply places; and, therefore, shall conclude with that which is supposed to be the principal: *Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.* For the credit of scripture, I cannot suppose this to have any other sense than is in the other passages; which, we have seen, is nothing to the purpose. If then we understand the being shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, as signifying the condition David's mother was in when he was shapen and conceived; all is easy, and agreeable to other parts of the bible. And, indeed, this receives some confirmation from the original word rendered conceive; which, according to the margin of our bible, signifies to *warm me*.

I now leave it to the judgment of unprejudiced persons to consider, whether the commonly-received doctrine of Original Sin, has any place in the bible; and whether it should be considered as the cause of actual sin? And if the one is not, and the other should not be; then let all who deal with sinners charge them with being the authors of their own evils, both of heart and life: which, so far as I can learn, the scripture always does. This will tend to humble, and to make them prize the mercy and grace their own wickedness has rendered necessary for them.

I shall add a few things respecting children. And as justification unto life is come upon all, it is a duty incumbent on them to remember their creator in the days of their youth; to act as under his eye, and to his honour. And although but

little of this is seen ; yet, perhaps, neither the nature of the body, nor the condition of the soul, is the proper cause of it. The air, earth, water and fire, of which the body consists, contain neither natural nor moral evil, either as simple ingredients or as a mixed composition. Yea, the predominancy of one element above another, in different bodies, which makes them light, or heavy, phlegmatic, or fiery, causes no real difference, in as much as each consists with a moral principle and practice.—The appetites and senses likewise are innocent in themselves, and in their use, when rightly used. Whence then ariseth the evil of them ? This is wholly from their misuse. And forasmuch as children are generally under the government of others, the right or wrong use of them, depends, in a great degree, on their wisdom and care. When then they are permitted to indulge themselves in eating, drinking, sleeping, &c. it grows into habit, becomes delightful, and makes a principal part of their care and comfort. And when too much abridged, their appetites are irritated, and their hearts hurt. A medium then is best calculated for continuance, and for answering every profitable purpose.

And in respect of their outward senses, much depends on a proper restraint. To be ignorant of evil, is the easiest way of being innocent. Children then should be kept both from the knowledge and practice of every thing that tends to attract and corrupt their hearts, which every kind of play does. Now the beginning of this, is the effect of their infant ignorance, independent of their moral disposition ; for, being incapable of judging of the nature and tendency of things ; that with which they soonest can verse and become familiar, makes the first impression on, and gains the earliest possession of their hearts. And although these, while in their unaccountable condition, are not cause of condemnation ; yet are they the instrumental cause of moral corruption. The contracting then such habits in early life, is extremely prejudicial, by giving a bias to the mind, which determines its future proceedings. It is like the wrong set of a young tree, which grows crooked in consequence. Hence it is, that, generally, evil is succeeded with evil ; that this bias prepares them for a succession of similar things ; and that the principal difference betwixt their first and last and intermediate objects of pursuit is, their being adapted to different degrees of reason and states of life. Now is it not highly probable, that all this

would



would be prevented by keeping them ignorant of, or restraining them from, the exercise of every diversion in the beginning?—And as none who wish well to their children, will permit them to err at their entrance into life; neither will they set them an evil example. Example is the child's alphabet; and, generally, the first lesson it learns. If then the parents swear, lie, talk nonsense, call names, break sabbaths, get drunk, sing foolish songs, play at cards, go to horse courses, are proud, passionate, &c. how are the children to escape the contagion of them? It is more than probable they will imitate them; and that will render the parents accountable for their children's sins.

Another method which tends to moral corruption is, their dress. Indeed, this, like many others, is become a national evil. And many parents, to please themselves, cloath their children with things more for ornament than use. This warps the mind that way. And hereby in particular, the fancy is set a-float; and new things, either in the matter, or form, or both continually occurring, keep it so; for weak as children are in respect of understanding, their eye is easily attracted by, and their fancy fired with outside ornaments; which gradually induce them to affect the best things, the most fanciful colour, and fashionable form. Hence, their care and labour soon centre in things which concern their exterior only. And that it is prejudicial, is plain from what it properly implies. It is a devotion of the mind, time, and talents to an excrescence, a something on the outside; which necessarily assimilates the soul into a fameness, in respect of idea, disposition, and desire, with the object of it. In consequence of which, it is carried on with more constraint, in the pursuit of it. And, as an unhappy effect, the conversation becomes deeply tinctured with, and turns chiefly upon, the article of dress. This shews the hold it has taken of the heart; for out of the abundance of it, the mouth speaketh.

Neither is the method of religious instruction better calculated to co-operate with the grace of God, to make them practically pious. Yea, rather, as managed by most, it has, I fear, a contrary effect. And, as an instance of this, whether teaching them forms of prayer, to be repeated at certain times, the meaning of which they know not, is not to teach them to speak without knowledge, and, in effect, to mock the Most High? And as hereby they contract a habit of senselessly supplicating

supplicating the Lord ; it is substituted in the place of praying according to their condition. And early prejudices having a prevailing influence in forming future life ; that, I judge, is one reason why so many afterwards pray like parrots, and to no better purpose.—And it seems to be the same in respect of all other means, whether public or private, where the letter and not the sense of them is taught ; for as hereby they do not distinguish the form from the power, nor the means from the end, but confound them together, or put the one for the other ; so prayers are said, sermons heard, sacraments received, scriptures read, &c. with the same spirit with which they swear, lie, get drunk, whore, play at cards, and do any other evil. Thus they reconcile religion and every sort of sin together ; concluding that they are religious, because they use the means of it.

Now these and other things of a correspondent kind, so corrupt the minds of most, that, by the time their reason renders them capable of conversing with the works and word of God ; of comprehending his nature and attributes ; and of discerning good and evil, and the ends for which they were born ; they have contracted habits which set their hearts against spiritual, and for temporal things.—That they are thus set, is certain ; and that these are the cause, is highly probable. For what attachment would any have to things with which they had no acquaintance, or never conversed ? None.

I take it for granted then, that custom is one grand cause of human corruption ; and that children by being accustomed to converse with idle and evil things, contract habits which become fixed principles, and thereby render it as difficult for them to cease from sin, as for an Etheopian to change his skin.—Of what concernment then is it to prevent those habits by keeping them from the occasion of them ! Surely of the greatest to every child of man !

But they must not be restrained only, but instructed also. In particular, they must be taught the nature of the new-covenant, viz. That in the beginning God made Adam the head of the human race ; and ordained, that what was done by him as their representative, should be done by them ; and, therefore, by *the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation*. But that neither the sin, nor the guilt of it might continue, he ordained his son Jesus Christ to be the mediator

mediator of the new covenant, to deliver them from both ; and so *by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life.*—The good effect of which is, that grace is given unto all. But notwithstanding that this grace, as a moral principle, is a proper preparation for religious performances ; yet to assist their reason in comprehending their duty, and to exercise their moral powers on proper objects, they must be taught the use of it. The doctrine of God's perpetual presence must be inculcated upon them, to assist their minds in judging of his nature, and manner of existing, that they may know his eye is continually upon them. This will tend to make them advert to, and entertain awful apprehensions of him. And to encrease the number of necessary ideas, his wisdom, greatness, and goodness, as manifested in the wonderful works of creation and providence, must be pointed out. Moreover, to provoke them to jealousy over themselves, they should be shewn, that they are accountable to God for their conduct, and that as he knows every thought, word, and work, they will be judged according to them. This will give them right notions of his holiness and justice. His mercy too must be manifested ; that, in case they offend, they may know how to find forgiveness. To which purpose, the extent of the new covenant must be signified to them, viz. that Jesus Christ died as well for actual as for Original Sin ; therefore, if they repent, and by faith appropriate the benefit of his death to themselves, they will be pardoned. And that they may know the necessity of, and be exercised in, prayer ; their wants, not only of mercy when they have done amiss, but also of grace, the help of the Holy Ghost in duties and difficulties, must be discovered. In a word, they should be taught both what to believe and do, in all that concerns them.

F I N I S.



